

Another Death In The Family

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SPIFFY DISCLAIMER THINGIE!!!

I don't own them (mores the pity!); they're DC's and Ah'm usin'em without permission:) :) Ah ain't makin' a plug nickel! If ya'll sue me Dick and Bruce are gonna be right peeved ...

Rated PG-13 for some verbal violence and a couple of naughty words.
So if those sort of things bother ya'll, skedaddle:) :)

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"Get out of here, Bruce!"

I hissed and turned my wheelchair away from The Batman. I'd never realized the human voice could hold such venom before until I heard it in my own. He didn't move a muscle. He just sat there in the iron patio chair on my balcony, that face a mask of cold calm. Waiting for me to get myself back under control. Nothing touches him; nothing. Damn him.

"Dick is dead and *you* killed him. Get out! Get out!" I was almost screaming. "I didn't kill him, Barbara," he said softly.

He seemed to be resigned to whatever abuse I wanted give him. What I couldn't figure out was why he was here in the first place. Duty? His version of a friendly cop consoling the grieving widow? Tying up loose ends? Bruce was always neat. I didn't want to see him. He *knew* that. My back was terribly straight now and my voice had stopped shaking.

"No," I said dully, "you didn't. But someone very much like you did." He was silent. There was really nothing he could say to that, was there?

"In the end," I said bitterly, "it doesn't really matter. Dick is still dead."

"I know that, Barbara," he said, perhaps more sharply than he had intended. That was the only crack I ever saw in that perfect, cool facade. Was the stress beginning to tell just a bit? "I was the one who identified the body."

I was tempted to laugh. The irony was exquisite.

"Bruce," I told him. "there are some things that should never come to pass. A father should never out live his son. And Dick was your son just as surely as if you'd been his biological father. He was the son of your spirit. You made him. And when you didn't like what you'd made you threw him away like used furniture. He loved you. I like to think that in your own limited way, you loved him. Why didn't you ever tell him that? No, you kept your silence and your heart intact. And now it's too late. He'll never know now, will he?" He didn't even have the grace to look uncomfortable.

"Barbara I came here because ..." He paused slightly in his conversational sojourn. As ever, those arctic blue eyes are a shield beyond which very few are allowed to pass. On occasion I have been one of them. But not now. "I thought you might need something." he said finally.

"From you?" I asked calmly, surprised. I shook my head. "No, Bruce I don't need anything. Not from *you*. And if I did you wouldn't know how to give it to me."

"Barbara ..." he began. I tried to ignore the trace of a resigned plea I heard buried in the recesses of that deep baritone voice. I think I succeeded rather well.

"I won't tell you again, Bruce," I warned him, low voiced. "If you don't leave right now, you'll wish you had. I'll find some way to hurt you, I swear I will." He looked away. I waited patiently for several moments before I made good on my threat, I did. I gave him a chance. No one can say that I didn't. But he made no move.

"Tell me something, Bruce," I said with perfect deliberation into the spreading silence, "when you identified Dick's body was it easier for you than identifying Jason? After all, practice makes perfect."

His eyes narrowed and he sat straight up in the chair as if electrified. His grip on the arms tightened. That was it. The sum total of his grief as far as I could see. But he did leave. Silently, without even a rustle of his cape to mark his passing. I closed my eyes for an instant, no more, and he was gone, faded into the dying night. But then, it was almost daylight and don't bad dreams always fade with the morning light? Wearily I wheeled my way back inside my empty apartment. Into my now empty life. I tried very, very hard not to think, a hard fought battle.

I lost.

I know a little about men like Bruce. In some ways, Dick was sometimes like that. Not surprising under the circumstances. The Batman is laconic, except for occasional outburst of anger and

violence. "Never let them see you cry, Barbara," he advised me once. But beneath that stoic, silent facade, something ominous sometimes roiled perilously near the surface. "Why does he do that?" I had once demanded exasperated with the man. Surprisingly, it was Dick who had the answer for me.

"Not everybody bleeds on the outside where you can see it." he had said.

I hadn't openly scoffed, at least. Dick, who loved Bruce would have been very hurt by that. Still it was hard for me to imagine anything touching the monolith that was The Batman. In its own way it was almost tragic. For most superheroes it was their costumed personas that are the red herrings, the false front with which they deceive the world. With The Batman it's just the opposite. As far as I had ever been able to determine "Bruce Wayne" died when he was about six years old in a spreading stain of his parent's blood.

Eventually I fell asleep sitting at my kitchen table. I have no clue how long I slept but when I looked out the window night was falling. The thing that woke me was a noise. It sounded exactly like something landing lightly on my balcony. For an instant I remembered the sound from the beginning of so many wonderful nights and my heart gladdened.

"Dick?" I called softly. But there was no one there to answer me, of course.

There was only the sound of the night wind, its lonely sibilant moans mourning the loss of the light as the sun set.

A lot like me.

After that sleep was impossible. Still restless, I drifted back out onto my balcony. It was so much cooler there Through the windows the lights of Gotham, that never sleeping engine of destruction shone and sparkled in the night. Feeling the need to breath the cool, clear air for a bit longer, I wheeled herself over to rest by the chair that Bruce had abandoned earlier. Closer now, I bent to inspect it's white painted iron arms. I ran suddenly shaky fingers over the cold metal. The iron of both arms lay bent and twisted, crushed with the force of a strength and passion it was hard to imagine. And along both sides where The Batman had lain hands on it the white expanse of metal was marred with a bright stain of blood.

"I told you," I seemed to hear the ghost like echo of Dick's musical voice, "not everybody bleeds on the outside where you can see it."

The End

End
file.